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MASS NATURE
A STUDY OF CROWDS

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Abstract

Mass Nature: A Study of Crowds. Research into the crowd in art. The work explores the metaphorical possibilities of the crowd form through perspective. A study taking the form of an exhibition of drawings exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from August 21 to September 7 1997 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component (66%) and the Research Paper (33%), together with the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

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Introduction

When I was deciding on the topic I would use for this paper at the beginning of the Graduate Diploma, I scoured my past artistic output for recurring themes. It was a revelation to find that the notion of the sum and its parts, groups of things, collections and collectives in general, and crowds and flocks in particular, had been a strong and persistent theme in my work since high school. When I looked at my work in these terms, I realised also that my musical and theatrical experiments had often contained elements of crowd manipulation. While playing drums in improvisational outfits, I gained despotically glee on the realisation that part of the drummer's job is to gauge the mood of the crowd and vary the rhythm, tempo and dynamics of the music to draw a response from the crowd. I can think of no experience in childhood that would have contributed to my fascination for crowds, apart from one instance of being in a crowd and feeling my feet leave the ground and being washed to and fro in the tidal sea of bodies, an experience now sought after by many in the mosh pits of the world. As well my work over the last few years at ABC-TV in the Canberra Press Gallery has exposed me to the interaction of politics and technology. Indeed, my job as a floor manager is at the point where the two meet and often involves setting politicians up in front of cameras and advising them and their spin doctors on the best ways to look sincere on live television.

Though little has been written on the phenomenon of crowds in the past, especially from a visual approach, it is a topic that holds great potential. The crowd is the point where human beings mass and can become something greater than the sum of their parts. The crowd is an animal. The crowd symbolises the natural force of collective will and a transformation of cultural subjects into a natural object. The crowd is an ancient and common entity: it feels so natural to be in one that we barely notice it. The crowd is a microcosm of society and crowds like all other human affairs are subject to the developments of art and technology and, as such, have evolved in response. The identification and discussion of the crowd's metaphorical qualities is what most fascinates me and what I intend to address.

There are many possible approaches to a study of crowds that I have considered and chosen to discard. A sociological approach would examine the social and historical factors that cause people to cluster into crowds; an architectural approach could discuss "crowd

containers"¹ and their moulding of crowds into certain shapes; a scientific approach would address the theories of Chaos, Complexity and emergent properties (systems that display evidence that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) to detect similarities between human behaviour and the behaviour of other life forms. As well there are many works written that offer ideas that span several disciplines for example: Marvin Minsky's "Society of the Mind" which contends that many agents operate in concert within the human brain; and Manuel de Landa's "Non-Organic Life" which holds that entities made up of smaller units such as sound and light waves are forms of non-organic life. An interesting approach which may fall down the cracks between disciplines would be to think about the "quality of quantity"², and the idea of critical mass: what changes take place in the individual when in a group: how many does it take to change?

The approach I will take is a visual one. I will discuss not crowds as such but depictions of crowds. The most fascinating crowds for me are those whose appearance holds metaphorical possibilities: the body as an analogy of a mass of people, the mass formation as an analogy of political power, visual perspective as a metaphor for political perspective. As I am being guided by the visual elements in crowd images, the conventional definition of crowd as a "large number of persons gathered together without orderly arrangement"³ becomes largely redundant. The examples I will use are mostly well outside this definition and could perhaps be better defined as hierarchies, mass formations or ornamental crowds. For the purposes of this study however, I will refer to them as crowds.

Crowds have always been inextricably involved with politics, and art and technology have always had a central role in both the formation and depiction of crowds. Crowds figure in the forming of republics and the self-determination of colonies. Crowds form in opposition to governments and governments attempt to garner support by organising mass formations. When painting was the chosen medium for the depiction of crowds, the printing press was often responsible

¹ Hitler's architect Albert Speer used the term "crowd container" when talking about the stadia and halls to be built for mass gatherings during the Nazi regime.

² During the Cold War when discussing nuclear weapons stockpiling by the two superpowers, Krushchev said that, "quantity has a quality all of its own." Quoted from Hoeg, Peter, Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow

³ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, p245

for forming crowds. Public notices - printed, distributed and stuck on public walls - notified people of meetings and gatherings. The technological advances of the industrial revolution drew people to European cities for economic reasons and created the conditions for the first dense urban crowds which were then recorded by the new visual medium of photography. Photography's child, film, recorded, through the hand of Leni Reifenstahl, the most vigorous political use of crowds ever in "Triumph of the Will". In a modern day low-tech echo of the crowd-galvanising effects of distributed literature, students in the Tiananmen Square protest in Beijing circulated notices by fax machine and photocopier and distributed audio cassette copies of an impassioned speech by one their leaders. The effect was a further swelling of the crowd's number.⁴ Some estimates were that up to a million people took part in the protest. Capitalism, through its agents, cars, television and home computers, is also responsible for the atomisation of crowds. According to Guy Debord, technology has an isolating effect and is responsible for "the lonely crowd" of people who, without these epics of technology would probably spend their time with other people, but with them, spend large parts of their lives alone in cars or in front of a television or home computer, engaged in activities that many other people are simultaneously engaged in. For example, millions of people worldwide all at home watching the live television coverage of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games could be regarded as a lonely crowd. They are all participating in the same event at the same time but are dispersed over the planet alone or in small groups.

With this paper I will therefore interrogate several depictions of crowds for their political and metaphorical content. I will consider the role of artistic and technological techniques and tools in both the formation of the crowds and in the depiction of the examples. My choice of pictures to use as examples is by no means exhaustive, but to include any more in a paper this size would be to limit the space dedicated to each one. I have chosen these particular examples both for a chronological range and so as to set up a structure of increasing scale. The first chapter starts by looking for crowds within the metaphorical body. The view-point progressively widens out in subsequent chapters through looking inside the crowd; looking from outside the crowd to looking at the global crowd.

⁴ Wark, McKenzie, Virtual Geography, p108

The Inner Crowd

The use of the body as a metaphor for the political community dates back to antiquity and persists today. The language of politics, the military, commerce and the law is filled with references to the body as a vessel for other bodies. The word corporation is derived from the Latin for body, corpus, so too corps - a body of men, and corporal - belonging to the body. Political communities are referred to as the body politic or body corporate, the leader of which is the head. Even other languages recognise the metaphor. In Japan where many corporations maintain a robust dynamic of family involvement, the word for corporation, soshiki, means literally the weaving together of tissue or flesh.

In the Numskulls, a British comic strip popular in the seventies, a man's body is inhabited by a number of homunculi - tiny people who live in the body and are responsible for its day to day operation. One little man works the brain, another the tongue, others armed with shovels are in charge of digestion, etc. The basis of the humour in the comic is the miscommunications and misunderstandings between the various internal workers and the man himself who seems to have a will independent of the homunculi. Although the Numskulls never pretends to be anything more than a children's comic, as a metaphor for a collaborative effort, it is a strong one. The work done by the various homunculi could be seen as representative of the various roles played by individuals within an ideal state. An ideal state was proposed three hundred years earlier in the same country by Thomas Hobbes.

The frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' political treatise of 1651 'Leviathan' depicts a gigantic monarch looming over the landscape of his dominion. His body is composed of hundreds of tiny figures - his subjects - who stand facing the head in abeyance to it. The image is a metaphor for Hobbes' thesis of 'The Social Contract' which proposed that individuals agree to relinquish their freedom to a single monarch on the condition that this was also done by all other individuals as well, and that the state was effectively run by the monarch. It is as if every one were to say to everyone else:

I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner.²

Hobbes' ideas were based on the premise that the individual is an undisciplined victim of his/her own appetites and needed the state in order to get along with others. Hobbes' state, like the Numskulls, never actually existed. Perhaps if an image were made that accurately depicted the real state of a given political system, the figure would appear as a strange beast with, for example, enormous hands (army), mutinous knees (underclass), and irregularities and distortions that represent the distortions and varied parts of the social construction.

The body was used as a metaphor for the disputes, contradictions and power struggles between clerical and civil powers within a state well before Hobbes' time and there is evidence to suggest that its use dates back to Roman times.

...the bodily metaphors of Antiquity hinged primarily on the system head/intestines/limbs (*caput/venter/membra*), despite the fact that the chest (*pectus*) and the heart (*cor*), as seats of feeling, obviously lent themselves to metaphorical use. Among the intestines, the liver... played an especially important symbolic role. First of all, it was used for the auguries inherited from the Etruscans, who considered the liver as a sort of sacred organ. In addition, it was believed to be the seat of the passions. In Menenius Agrippa's apologue the belly (*venter*) - in other words the intestines as a whole - plays the coordinating role within the body, and the limbs (*membra*) obey its orders, for the belly transforms food into blood, which is then sent through the veins to the entire body.²

In the Christian models developed in the Middle Ages, Christ is the head of society as well as of the Church and God is the head of Christ: in effect adding yet another layer of figures within figures. Christ being the head gives direction on earth through the clerical and the regal: the Pope and the Sovereign who are organs in the chest. In the Christian system the liver and intestines were dropped as they were seen to be too closely linked with pagan divination rituals, and as the symbolic seat of voluptuousness and the vices of the flesh.

²Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, 1651, p87

² Le Goff, Jacques, "Head or Heart/ The political use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages", Fragments for a History of the Human Body Part 3, Zone Books 1989

In another configuration:

The state (*res publica*) is a body (*corpus quoddam*) ...within that state, the prince (*princeps*) occupies the place of the head; he is subject to the unique God and to those who are his lieutenants on earth, for in the human body the head is also governed by the soul. The senate occupies the place of the heart, which gives good and bad deeds their impulses. The function of the eyes, the ears and the tongue is assured by the judges and the provincial governors (*judices et praesides provinciarum*). The "officers" and "soldiers" (*officiales et milites*) can be compared to the hands. The prince's regular assistants are the flanks. The quaestors (quaestors or stewards) and the registrars...evoke the image of the belly and the intestines which, if they have been stuffed through excessive greed and if they hold in their contents too obstinately, give rise to countless and incurable illnesses and, through their vices, can bring about the ruin of the body as a whole. The feet that always touch the soil are the peasants (*agricolae*). Being governed by the head is especially necessary for them, because they are faced by numerous detours as they walk upon the earth in the service of the body, and because they need the firmest support in order to keep the mass of the entire body erect, to support it and to move it about. Deprive the most robust body of the support given by its feet, and it will not advance under its own strength but will either crawl shamefully, painfully and unsuccessfully on its hands, or will move about like brute beasts.³

By 1302, in an anonymous treatise supporting King Philip the Fair of France over Pope Boniface called *Rex Pacificus*, the metaphor of man as the microcosm of society focuses almost entirely on the head/pope and heart/king opposition. From the head/pope emanate the nerves which carry doctrine to the faithful and bind the limbs together. From the heart/king emanate the blood vessels which carry the force of law and justice. Since blood is more important to the body than nerves, argues the writer, it follows that the king is superior to the Pope.

With the frontispiece to *Leviathan*, is another stage of the evolution of the body metaphor. Hobbes, much to the displeasure of contemporary clerics, suggested a political system in which God played no part and where the monarch was absolutely sovereign. All interpretations of the Bible were left to the King. Hobbes' argument for adopting such a system was that civil wars, such as the English Civil War that occurred during his own lifetime, were due to arguments between the clerical and civil powers; to avoid such disputes the King should have absolute power and parliament and the people should be subservient to him. Hence the image in the

³ John of Salisbury, 1159, quoted in LeGoff

frontispiece to Leviathan. The Monarch is the "head" and absolute ruler of the state/body which is composed of all other members of the society.

The pluralist nature of the English model of government and opposition is descended from the English Civil War when the two sides of parliament were actually two opposing armies. Elias Canetti notes in Crowds and Power⁴ that the set up of this type of parliament with its dual opposed crowds, is akin to a war in stasis. Instead of the winner being the side that kills the most in the moment of conflict, the winner is the side that at the moment of the vote can attract the most votes.

It is:...a form of warfare that has renounced killing⁵

The Australian parliament is based on the pluralist English model.

How would the body look if the body metaphor was applied to the Australian political system? The House of Representatives would be the heart and responsible for keeping the body supplied with its nutrients. The Senate would be the liver - acting as a filter for suspect legislation and succumbing to the occasional cirrhosis when it creates blockages that cause the whole body to collapse. The public sector would be the intestinal system with its own set of hierarchies and responsible for the digestion of what it is given to digest, or the implementation of legislation. What then of the head? The person referred to as the Australian Head of State lives in another country, is also the Head of State of other countries and has merely a representative in Australia. The body metaphor applied to Australia would make Australia a body whose head is attached to other bodies both larger and smaller than itself. The other bodies attached to the head would represent all the other countries of the Commonwealth who, like Australia, retain the British monarch as their head of state. A suitable visual symbol for the Commonwealth would therefore be a figure made up of many bodies all attached to the same head.

The persistence of the use of the body as a metaphor for political systems suggests that in order to be able to comprehend something as large and complex as a society or large community of people, one needs to use a visual device. That device in this case is to relate one's

⁴ Canetti, Elias, Crowds and Power p220

⁵ *ibid*, p220

own body to the society by imagining it as a microcosm of the society. In this way one looks both inward and outward and sees one's context within a larger scheme. One's body is composed of many systems within systems, down to microbes and atoms; and it also, along with other bodies, makes up a societal body. This is in turn part of the larger world populous which is a part of the world and which is part of the Solar System and so on. The teleological notion that one is part of a larger body and is in fact composed of many smaller bodies allows the comprehension of a concept that would otherwise be difficult to grasp, and a metaphorical context of one's place in the whole scheme of things. The use of this device is so prevalent that it is difficult to conceive of discussing the political community without it.



Heironymous Bosch, Christ Carrying the Cross, 76.7X83.5cm

...the crowd is a phenomenon to be understood in terms of its own internal logic, not as a mere reflection of the external world (or, as whether they are a crowd of the (rhythmic) or a crowd of (stagnant)). He also describes four main attributes common to every crowd:

...the crowd wants to grow; while the crowd there is equality; the crowd loves density and the crowd needs a direction.¹

He then classifies crowds according to their prevailing emotion. This he breaks down into five main emotions, all of which would rarely be found in a pure state but would overlap in any given crowd: Fasting

¹ Crowds, Mass, Groups and Power, p.12

The Crowd Image as Social Critique

Depictions of crowds have often been used to criticise the prevailing social order or those who manipulate it. In the following examples, comparisons are made between crowds and animals.

Less than the Sum of its Parts

In Bosch's painting, Christ Carrying the Cross, Bosch has manipulated perspective to create a feeling of claustrophobia within the crowd and successfully depicted the animal-like qualities of the mob.

In the painting, a mob surrounds the figure of Christ and fills the space of the picture. The view-point is from above the heads of the crowd looking down, but the perspective of the individual faces is at eye level, giving the impression that the figures are standing on a tiered set of platforms making a wall of people such as you might see on the sloping ground or tiered terraces of a sports stadium. This enables an unencumbered view of all participants. Bosch has cropped his crowd so that no horizon and no end to the crowd is seen. The crowd fills the picture and even bleeds off the edges. This gives the impression in a small number of figures of an enormous crowd whose area far exceeds the picture plane. Christ is surrounded on all sides by the leering faces of his tormentors. The faces emerge from a layered darkness as if the press of the crowd has blocked out the light. Christ's only escape from the picture plane pictorially and metaphorically, is by way of the diagonal passage of his cross - symbolic of the means of his escape from life.

In Canetti's Crowds and Power, crowds are classified according to attributes such as their receptiveness to outsiders joining; to the nature of their goal - whether it is near or far; to whether they are an active crowd (rhythmic) or a waiting crowd (stagnating). He also ascribes four main attributes common to every crowd:

the crowd wants to grow; within the crowd there is equality; the crowd loves density and the crowd needs a direction.¹

He then classifies crowds according to their prevailing emotion. This he breaks down into five main emotions, all of which would rarely be found in a pure state but would overlap in any given crowd: Baiting

¹ Canetti, Elias, Crowds and Power, p32

Crowds single out and persecute an individual eg: a lynch mob; Flight Crowds are fleeing unfavourable conditions, an exodus of refugees; Prohibition Crowds are opposed to something, a strike, demonstration or protest crowd; Reversal Crowds are crowds which once were the downtrodden but have assumed power, eg: a revolutionary force; and Feast Crowds are celebratory, relaxing the usual customs for a brief period. In Canetti's classification of crowds, Bosch's mob would be a baiting crowd. The baiting crowd is one that pursues and persecutes an individual whose difference is perceived to be a threat to the local community, someone who, in today's terms would be seen as an 'other'. Each crowd member's fear of being different and of being persecuted is turned around and directed at one individual. The constant threat of persecution and death hangs over everyone and

...creates...a need to deflect death onto others. The formation of baiting crowds answers this need.²

The fear of being penalised for murder is lessened when the murder is shared. The crowd's excitement reaches a peak in the act of execution after which it tends to disperse.

In scientific terms, the notion of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts is expressed as an emergent system: that a superorganism with qualities not present in each of the individual entities "emerges from the mass of ordinary...organisms."³ The example most often used in science of an emergent system is the hive of bees. As opposed to the idea of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, Bosch's crowd, in its appeal to the lowest human values, has become something less than the sum of its parts. It seems to be true in many cases that the higher the number of people in a mob, the lower down the evolutionary scale is its crowd mind. This crowd, though composed of human individuals, has given itself over to its lower instincts and, as a whole, has become an animal. Bosch's crowd is an ignorant rabble of jabbering buffoons. The impression is given that this crowd is united only in the baseness of its prevailing emotion and that without the focus of a persecution its members would find little to unite them. This crowd is a group of people who have united to become an animal. Canetti maintains that this sort of blood thirsty crowd is now:

² Canetti, p56

³ Kelly, Kevin, *Hive Mind, Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines*, Fourth Estate, 1994, p14

preserved in the newspaper reading public, in a milder form it is true, but because of its distance from events, a more irresponsible one. One is tempted to say that it is the most despicable and, at the same time, most stable form of such a crowd. Since it does not even have to assemble, it escapes disintegration; variety is catered for by the daily reappearance of the papers.⁴

One of Bosch's most persistent preoccupations was the playing on and portrayal of human fears. Represented in this painting are some that relate to crowds. The fear of not belonging, not conforming, of appearing different, of being on the wrong end of a hostile mob, of being misunderstood, trapped and persecuted. Through the manipulation of perspective, the heightened view-point, the tiered faces and the dark space between them, Bosch has embodied these fears and created the impression of a vast claustrophobic mob.

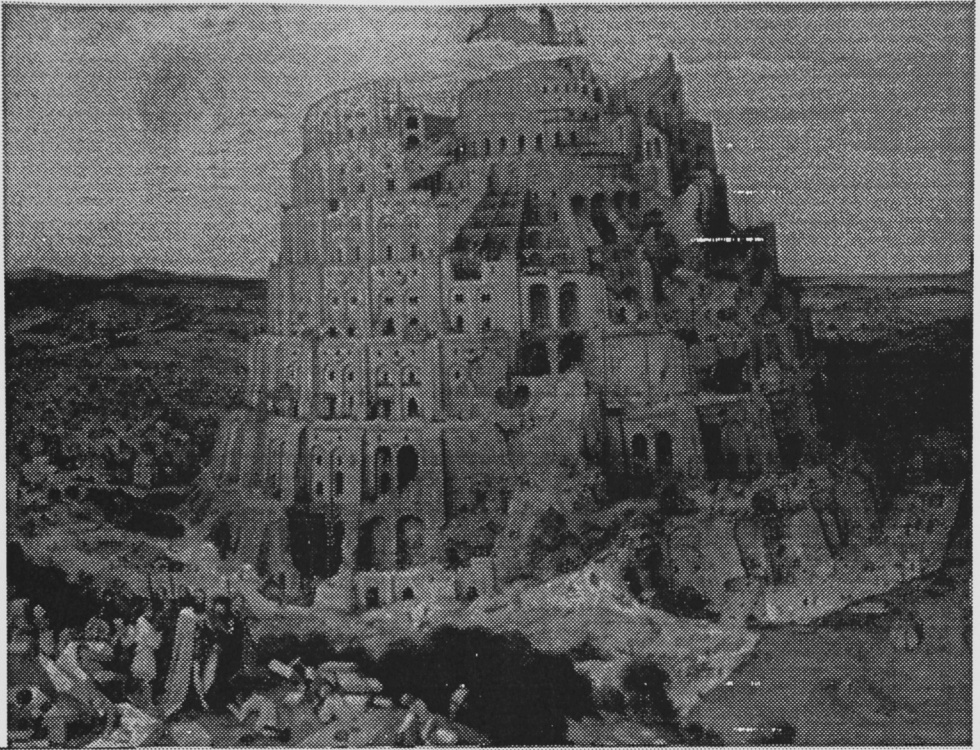
The presence of the soldier in the painting serves as a symbol for another crowd. His uniform makes us think not of the individual within it, but of the army to which he belongs. Although Bosch has painted him in contemporary Flemish uniform, the soldier, being at Calvary, is a Roman centurion or the commander of one hundred men. Each set of one hundred men or century constitutes half a maniple, and twenty to forty of those make up a Roman legion. The single figure of the soldier in the painting, therefore, effectively becomes, like a button on an interactive computer program, the door or representative for the vast crowd of the Roman army and ultimately Rome itself. Canetti calls this metonym a crowd crystal.

Bosch offers a critique on the fallibility of the social body when it capitulates to its baser emotions: when the lowest common denominator in a group becomes the guiding principle, when the animal takes over the person, when a group of people becomes an animal.

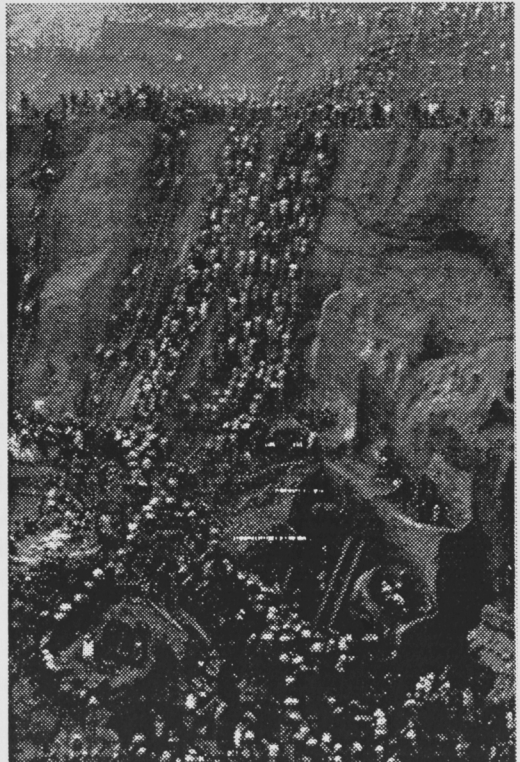
The Crowd Image as Social Critique: Bees

In both Sebastiao Salgado's photograph of mine workers in Brazil's Serra Pelada mine and the painting of the Tower of Babel by Pieter Breugel are critiques of both artists' contemporary political systems.

⁴ Canetti, p59



(above) Pieter Breugel, *The Tower of Babel*. (1563)
 (right) Sebastiao Salgado, from *The Workers*, (1990)



Salgado's vast photographic project, "Workers" depicts the work and conditions of manual labourers from all parts of the globe. His empathetic yet unblinking photographs of workers have been informed by his previous career as an economist in that he looks at his subjects in terms of their part in the machinations of the macro and micro economies, and the manipulations they are subject to.

The diggings at the Serra Pelada mine is the building of the Tower of Babel in negative. The opposite of construction is not deconstruction but excavation. While the building of the Tower of Babel was an attempt to reach Heaven, the gold mines of the Serra Pelada in Northern Brazil appear to be nothing less than an attempt to dig down to Hell. The circular form of the excavations resembles Dante's descending rings of Hell as depicted by Botticelli, Blake and others.

The visual comparison of the mine workers with a colony of ants or a hive of bees cannot be avoided. Each miner carries a parcel of material from one place to another, queuing along the paths and ladders, then queues again to return and repeat the process. It seems like all members are working toward a common goal.

The characteristic in hive behaviour of all members working in concert for the perpetuation of the hive however, is not present in the Brazilian mine. The good of the group is not the goal of the miners and the perpetuation of the mine not the issue. Each miner is busily rummaging through his own plot of earth for whatever gold he can extract from it. The goal is the same for each worker: personal gain, but it is not a common goal. They are all working for their own good and are concentrated together in the same place not because they want to be together, but because that's where the gold is.

Behind Salgado's photographic oeuvre lies an economic and political rationale. His own country, Brazil, home of the Serra Pelada mine, is a country with wild inequities between the rich minority and the poor. The crowds in his photographs are at the lowest level of the economy and have the least political power, but their labour is vital to keep first world economies running. Salgado offers a critique of those economies that simultaneously demand the product of workers' labour while denying any responsibility for their well being. As Eduardo Galeano says in his introductory essay to Salgado's book "An Uncertain Grace", these images:

...question the hypocritical frontiers that safeguard the bourgeois order and protect its right to power and inheritance.⁵

Although the mine workers are ostensibly working for themselves, it is the economy that ultimately benefits.

In 1563, Pieter Breugel painted two versions of the Tower of Babel. Both paintings resemble enormous, partially built hives covered in the small, black ant-like figures of the people building them. In the larger Vienna version, Nimrod, the Biblical king who ordered the Tower's construction, can be seen in the foreground pompously overseeing its construction.

In Biblical terms, the story of the Tower of Babel is the explanation of the many languages around the world, and the source of all the world's crowds. The myth was popular in Flanders in Breugel's time but was used as a parable to illustrate the folly of ambitious vanity. In the story, a large group of people, ruled by King Nimrod and united by religion and the common cause of building a tower to Heaven (as opposed to a stairway), becomes divided half way through the construction when God decides they are becoming too ambitious and gives each of them a unique language. The once united crowd is suddenly unable to communicate within itself and fragments into individual sub-communities. Their capacity to collaborate frustrated by the lack of a common language, the construction is thrown into confusion and is eventually abandoned. Babel's crowd is defeated half way through it's intended life because its members cannot communicate between themselves sufficiently to keep established its hive mind.

Breugel, like Salgado, offers a critique of the events that dominated the politics of his time. The Flemish King Philip is represented in the painting by King Nimrod, king of the hive, overseeing the construction of his plan to rival Heaven. Philip's plan was grand too: he wanted to organise the masses of the Netherlands into a unified state. Breugel has used the myth of Babel in which a unified mass of people becomes divided because of vanity, as an allegory of the folly and vanity of King Philip's plans. The painting is:

⁵ Galeano, Eduardo, *Salgado, 17 Times, An Uncertain Grace*, Aperture, 1990

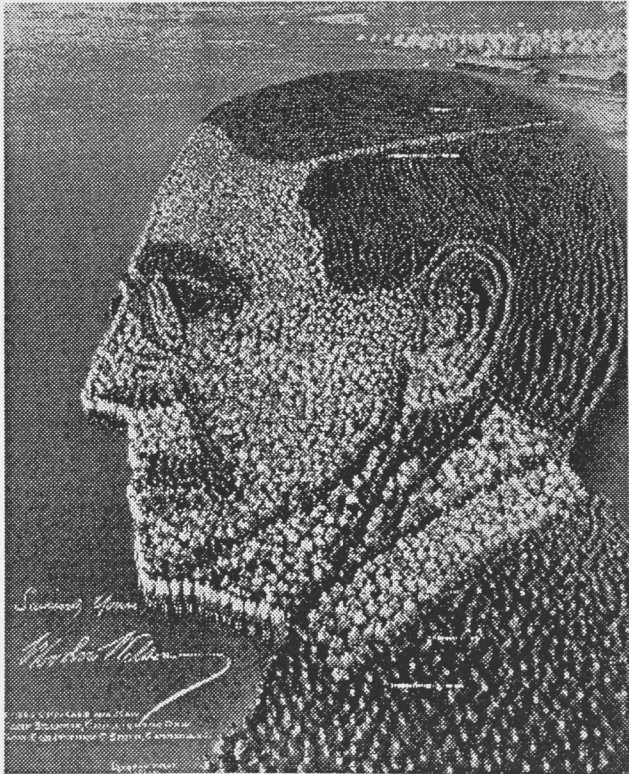
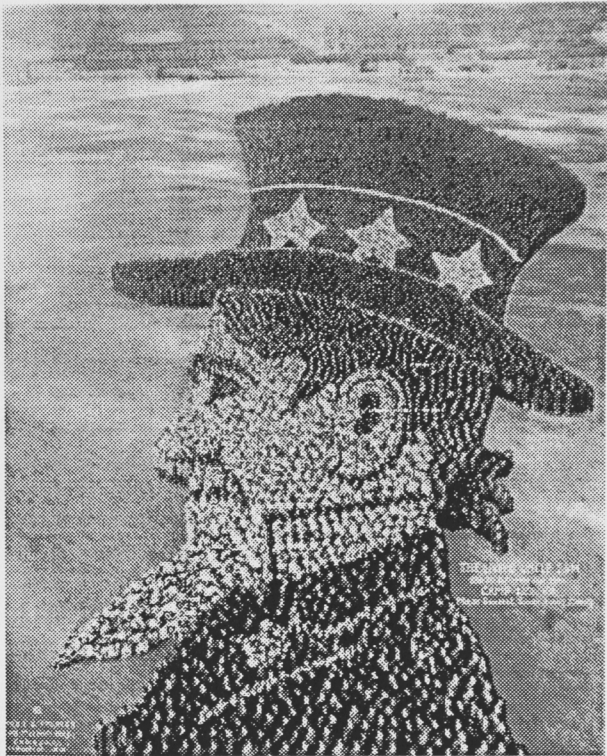
a symbolic portrait of the Netherlands and a confirmed pessimist's history of human society.⁶

Like the story of Babel, the Brazilian mine images harbour a mythic, parable-like narrative - yet again the inverse of Babel's. Salgado's crowd is divided to start with and is drawn together through each individuals common though separate goal of becoming rich in his own right. Babel's crowd was initially united and later atomised, to be spread across the globe without a common language and destined to wait until the information age to be re-united. The two works also have in common a depiction of a crowd working together on a large project that harbours a critique of each artist's contemporary politics.

⁶ Foote, Timothy, *The World of Breugel*, Time/Life, 1968

(right) Mole and Thomas, *The Living Uncle Sam* (1919). Uncle Sam made up of 19,000 men.

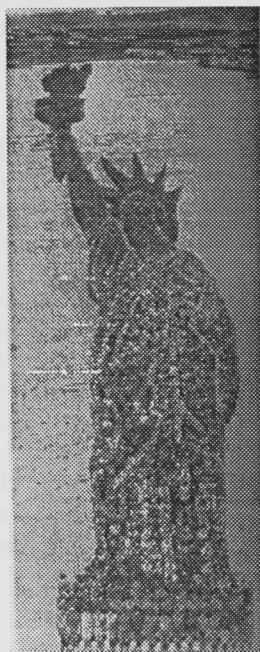
(below right) Mole and Thomas, *President Woodrow Wilson* (1918). Woodrow Wilson made up of 21,000 men.





(above) E. O. Goldbeck, *Indoctrination*
Division, Air Training Command, Lackland Air
Base, San Antonio, Texas, July 19, 1947
 (1947)

(right) Mole and Thomas, *Liberty* (1918)



Ornamental Crowds and Secret Perspective

The formation and use of ornamental crowds by states offers an interesting analogy of political power. The participants in the crowd know they are part of something big but from their perspective cannot see what it is. The leader, viewing the crowd from a vantage point in front of and above it, can see the shape that the crowd is making and can make decisions that will affect it. Similarly, the leader has an overview of the population as a whole that the population itself cannot have.

It might occur to a lost outsider who happens by accident upon the making of the photograph, The Living Uncle Sam (1919) by Arthur S. Mole and John D. Thomas, that s/he had somehow stumbled into a Fellini film. In the hazy distance of a featureless landscape the intruder perceives a long line of people. As s/he approaches s/he realises the line is the edge of a vast crowd with very well-defined edges. All members of the crowd are facing the same way and seem to be staring at the top of a tower from which instructions are being delivered by megaphone: "...you there with the orange hair take a step to your left...no, I said your left...". The crowd is not the milling chaotic crowd with a dense focus and thinning edges the intruder is used to, but a concise, organised legion of uniformed men whose density is consistent from centre to edge where it abruptly ends. While the wanderer is wondering why these people are so closely bunched and why they don't spread out to give each other a bit of room, the megaphone voice tells him/her to "clear off would you, you're ruining the edge."

Like the engraving used for the cover of Hobbes' Leviathan (1651) referred to earlier, The Living Uncle Sam is an example of the use of ornamental crowds to reinforce the unity of the state. On the cover of Leviathan, the composite figure of a monarch looms over the houses and rolling hills of a contented landscape, arms spread in protection and authority. In The Living Uncle Sam, a depiction of the face of the fictitious patriarch lies on the landscape like a vast sand drawing, commandeering a large area of land. Because there is so much distance between the foreground at the bottom of the photograph and the background at the top, the top of the picture fades into the hazy frozen distance of a North American January. There may also have been a degree of photographic manipulation in this: there is evidence of retouching on other parts of the image. The reason that this peopled formation appropriates so much ground space lies with

the laws of perspective. In the photograph, the landscape recedes horizontally away from the viewer, but the image of Uncle Sam stands straight up on the picture plane. The soldiers have been arranged so that only from the viewpoint of the camera is the image in correct proportion. At any other point the formation would become unintelligible and distorted, much like the effect of looking at a painting from an oblique angle. Because the viewpoint of the photographer is one of looking obliquely across the land, the soldiers had to be arranged in such a way that the Uncle Sam shape retains its proportions. Consequently it has taken less soldiers to create the bottom part of the image than it has to create the top. In fact, it appears there are more soldiers in the top part of the hat than in the whole rest of the figure - even though it makes up only a relatively small part of the photograph. From directly above, the figure would look unintelligible.

The photographers here are employing the principles of anamorphosis to make the image legible. Anamorphosis, or the 'secret perspective', is a technique of drawing perspective that renders an image incomprehensible when seen from any viewpoint other than the one it was intended to be seen from. The paradox of classical perspective and its tangential relative, anamorphosis, is that the selective distortion of an image will contribute to its better portrayal. This is a paradox that has preoccupied philosophers for centuries. To Descartes it was more evidence of the role that illusion plays in perception:

Everything I have hitherto accepted for what is most true and most certain I have learned from or through the senses: but I have sometimes found that the senses were deceivers, and it is prudent never to trust oneself entirely to those which have once deceived us.¹

From his studies on anamorphosis (and other topics), Descartes extrapolated a philosophy of the important role of viewpoint in perceiving the world.

Like a Michelangelo drawing seen from the viewpoint of an ant crawling over it, the ornamental formation is not perceptible to those on the ground and part of it. It can only be perceived from a certain vantage point: that of one standing at a certain height and distance observing it. Similarly, the position of being a foot soldier in a huge

¹ Descartes, Dioptrics 1637, as quoted in Baltrusaitis, J, Anamorphism

army would not allow a comprehension of one's part in the greater scheme of the generals' intentions. One would have a sense of being a part of a bigger thing but would have only limited knowledge of what that thing is. The relationship between the figures in the photograph and the position of the camera is analogous to the relationship between the social body and its leader.

Not only are the soldiers in the Uncle Sam image making up the image of their fictitious figure head, they are being seen from the figure head's vantage point. The non-existent figurehead/ruler is present in the embodiment of his image. The soldiers are aware of being watched by him (through the state apparatus) and regulate their behaviour accordingly. An element of Foucault's description of the panopticon is thereby introduced:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.³

The mass of soldiers and metaphorically the entire social body knows that it can be observed at any time - though not necessarily all the time - and acts as though it is being watched.

[the] Panopticon [is] subtly arranged so that an observer may observe, at a glance, so many different individuals...⁴

Until they found their stride organising crowds into images of American icons such as President Woodrow Wilson (1918) and The Human American Eagle (1919), the photographers, Mole and Thomas, had previously made their living by organising the members of small country church communities into mass ornaments depicting crucifixes, crowns and other Christian symbols and selling the photographs. These photographs were statements of the unity of the participants' common faith disguised as popular culture.

That a piece of popular culture could be transformed into a nationalistic statement was one the concerns of German cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer. The image of the peopled Uncle Sam as a state ornament has parallels with the images of state-sponsored

3 Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish p.202

4 Foucault, p207

mass formations that were about to appear across the Atlantic in pre-world war two Germany - on which Kracauer based some of his studies. Kracauer drew conclusions about the age in which he lived from his examinations of popular culture. Like a latter day Toulouse Lautrec, Kracauer found his muse and subject matter in the form of the troupes of US dancing girls known as the Tiller Girls who were popular in the nightclubs of 20's Berlin. His term "mass ornament" describes a mass of people organised or coerced into a shape or image that represents a collective belief or feeling. Kracauer saw the mass, synchronised dances of the Tiller Girls as the embodiment of prosperous US industrial capitalism:

In that postwar era, in which prosperity appeared limitless and which could scarcely conceive of unemployment, the girls were artificially manufactured in the USA and exported to Europe by the dozens.⁵

Kracauer had the starry-eyed vision of America that only an outsider could have:

When they formed an undulating snake, they radiantly illustrated the virtues of the conveyer belt; when they tapped their feet in fast tempo it sounded like business, business; when they kicked their legs high with mathematical precision, they joyously affirmed the progress of rationalisation; and when they kept repeating the same movements without ever interrupting their routine, one envisioned an uninterrupted chain of autos gliding from the factories into the world, and believed that the blessings of prosperity had no end.⁶

Kracauer modified his ideas after the Second World War and after seeing the supreme document of the use of the ornamental crowd as political statement: Leni Reifenstahl's "Triumph of the Will". This six hour newsreel is a recording of the 1936 Nuremberg rally - a Roman Empire-inspired pageant and the mother of all pep talks - which featured massed formations of soldiers and youths marching up and down in a spectacular show of military nationalism, with Hitler addressing and observing the display from his raised dais. Kracauer saw the cinematographer's role as analogous to the leader's role, commenting that Reifenstahl's film represented the "subjugation/submission of the masses under the

⁵ Kracauer, Siegfried, *Girls and Crisis*, FZ, May 27, 1931, quoted in Witte, Karsten, Introduction to Kracauer's "The Mass Ornament", New German Critique, no. 5 Spring 1975, pp63-64

⁶ Kracauer, *ibid*

director/dictator..."⁷ Kracauer saw Reifensahl's role as almost as powerful as Hitler's: she saw the crowd not only from Hitler's viewpoint but from all other viewpoints in the stadium and was responsible for the interpretation of the ideas in the rally and its dissemination out to the public.

Writing before World War Two, Kracauer saw mass ornament as mythological (ie teleological and harmless), but ambivalent.⁸ It was only after the war in his contentious essay of 1947 about the psychology of German film, From Caligari to Hitler, did he realise that the mythical idea of the mass ornament had been sequestered by the Nazis and that

...German film of the Weimar epoch mirror[ed] an authoritarian disposition of the nation that led to fascism.⁹

of which the mass ornament was a key part. Kracauer realised that the mass authority of the mass ornament had been sinisterly usurped by the Nazis and formed into:

...configurations symbolising the readiness of the masses to be shaped and used at will by their leaders.¹⁰

Since then the mass ornament has been the domain of political powers intent on reaffirming an image of their authority. They serve as an organic coat of arms: an emblematic display of state-sponsored patriotic feeling. These mass displays will also have a huge crowd encircling them as well as being transmitted via television to the watching crowd of the public. As Guy Debord says in Society of the Spectacle:

[spectacle] is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself.¹¹

The use of mass ornament survives today to reinforce nationhood and diplomacy in international events such as the Olympic Games.

⁷ Kracauer, quoted by Witt, Karsten, Introduction to Kracauer's The Mass Ornament, New German Critique, No.5 Spring 1975

⁸ Jolly, Martyn, From the Perpendicular to the Oblique, 1995, p30

⁹ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler

¹⁰ Kracauer, Seigfried, From Caligari to Hitler, quoted by Witt, Karsten, Introduction to Kracauer's The Mass Ornament, New German Critique, No.5 Spring 1975, p61

¹¹ Debord, Guy, Society of the Spectacle, stanza 23

The host nation will traditionally attempt to outdo the previous host nation in the spectacle and cohesion of its opening ceremony. The governments of remaining hard-line Communist countries such as China and North Korea - in a state of denial about the cohesion of their state - also regularly sculpt their citizenry into giant ornamental formations to whip up nationalistic fervour. Mass ornament is so commonly used in North Korea that one delegate to an international Youth Festival in Pyongyang:

... started wondering whether, if you asked a Korean the time, 500 of them would form a huge human clock.¹²

¹² Hoare, Heather, "A Guide to North Korea for the Ideologically Unstable", Radar Magazine, Dec 1987



Cover photograph from *The Bulletin* 3.8.96

The Absent Crowd

The individuals within the crowd are not the focus of the political gathering or the photographer's interest. They are not politicians, but they are not the photographer or camera operator. Instead of addressing directly those present, the politician may be addressing 500,000s of people globally through what McKenna Work calls the "extended terrain"¹ of television coverage.

In this photograph, which appeared on the cover of *The Bulletin* of 3 September 1996, rioting trade unionists attempt to pull down the front doors of Canberra's Parliament House during an otherwise peaceful rally by students, unionists, Aborigines and others concerned about government budget cuts. Through the glass one can see the Parliament House doormen and police also pulling at the doors, trying to prevent them from being opened. Along the dividing line between the crowd and the guards a row of faces is reflected in the glass. In Canetti's classification of crowds, according to their protesting intention, this crowd would be closest to a *Reichthum* crowd which he defines as:

A second type of crowd... created by a refusal a large number of people together refuse to continue to do what, till then, they had done singly.

In Canetti's view

what is decisive about it is its negative character...

the firmness of their refusal is the measure of their togetherness. From the moment at which this crowd is transformed with the requirement of obedience, and this requirement is essential characteristic as long as it exists. Thus, one could also speak of a negative crowd. It is formed by resistance; the crowd acts as a barrier against the world, it does nothing but place. Each person weighs the other in his or her own hand, no one is part of the dam. Anyone who gives way, and transgresses the position, is outlawed by all the others.²

Though Canetti's example is a strike crowd rather than a police crowd, the description remains relevant. The crowd has been formed in response to a circumstance that it opposes and it expresses its feelings at the doors of those whom it blames. In other circumstances

¹ Mark McKenna, *Visual Geography*, p1

² Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, p63

The Absent Crowd and the Fourth Estate

The individuals with the most influence over public opinion at a political gathering are no longer those responsible for its content: the politicians, but those responsible for its depiction and dissemination: the photographer or camera operator. Instead of addressing merely those present, the politician may be addressing, live, millions of people globally through what McKenzie Wark calls the "expanded terrain"¹ of television coverage.

In this photograph, which appeared on the cover of "The Bulletin" of 3 September 1996, rioting trade unionists attempt to pull open the front doors of Canberra's Parliament House during an otherwise peaceful rally by students, unionists, Aborigines and others concerned about government budget cuts. Through the glass can be seen the Parliament House doormen and police also pulling at the doors, trying to prevent them from being opened. Along the dividing line between the crowd and the guards a row of fists is reflected in the glass. In Canetti's classification of crowds according to their prevailing emotion, this crowd would be closest to a Prohibition crowd which he defines as:

A special type of crowd...created by a refusal: a large number of people together refuse to continue to do what, till then, they had done singly...

In Canetti's view

what is decisive about it is its negative character...

the firmness of their refusal is the measure of their togetherness. From the moment of its birth this crowd is transfused with the negativeness of prohibition, and this remains its essential characteristic as long as it exists. Thus one could also speak of a negative crowd. It is formed by resistance; the prohibition is a frontier nothing can cross, a dam nothing can pierce. Each person watches the other to see whether he remains part of the dam. Anyone who gives way and transgresses the prohibition is outlawed by all the others.²

Though Canetti's example is a strike crowd rather than a protest crowd, the description remains relevant. The crowd has been formed in response to a circumstance that it opposes and is expressing its feelings at the doors of those whom it blames. In other circumstances

¹ Wark, McKenzie, Virtual Geography, p1

² Canetti, Crowds and Power, p63

construction, forestry and mining unionists, tertiary students and Aborigines would perhaps find little in common, but faced with a common threat they find themselves rubbing shoulders with each other. The crowd has been formed and defines itself in terms of what it is opposed to.

In this scenario there is one person who can mix freely with both the protesters and the authorities: the photographer. The camera is the photographer's badge that proclaims s/he is neither part of the protest nor part of the subject of the protest. S/he can view the crowd from above and from a distance and see the crowd from an angle that those in the crowd cannot see. S/he can see all of the crowd. S/he chooses however in this instance to see only a small part of the crowd. His/her concerns are on a different axis to that of the two opposing sides of the protest.

It is unclear whether the presence of the photographer in this case was provocative to the protesters or that they would have rioted anyway. What is clear is the rioters' misapprehension of the power held by the photographer which can mean the difference at the least between positive and negative public opinion and even, in some cases, life and death. Barthes says in Camera Lucida:

...I feel that the photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice (apology of this mortiferous power: certain Communards paid with their lives for their willingness or even their eagerness to pose on the barricades: defeated, they were recognised [in photographs] by Thiers's police and shot, almost every one).³

Similarly the persecution of students and workers involved in the Beijing Tiananmen Square protest by Chinese authorities continues to this day, largely aided by western media reportage. CNN's live satellite reporting of the protest was recorded off the television by the Chinese Embassy in the United States and the tapes sent back to Beijing, where the Bureau of Public Safety examined them, identified protesters and arrested them. Ironically, it was CNN's coverage that helped to initially bolster the crowd.

The power of the press is recognised as being so great that for centuries in Britain it has been referred to as the "Fourth Estate". This is in reference to the other three estates of the realm: the Lords

³ Barthes, Roland, Camera Lucida, p10

Spiritual (the clergy); the Lords Temporal (House of Lords) and the Commons.

The sovereign and these three estates together form the corporation or body politic, of the kingdom.⁴

The press is rhetorically referred to as the Fourth Estate because its influence in public opinion is seen to be comparable to that of the governing powers.

The photographer or camera operator at the Parliament House rally, under direction from an editor or producer, has the power to selectively amplify sentiment, message or action. Although the crowd at this rally was estimated at 25,000 people, it was only the violent fraction that was reported at any length in the press. In fact the majority of the crowd did not realise there had been a riot until seeing it later in the press. The photographer in this case is not here to represent the overriding sentiment of the crowd, but to get 'newsworthy' pictures: ie, pictures that are perceived to be of interest to readers.

Shortly after the riot, police subpoenaed press photographs and video footage of the event to identify 'ringleaders' and to use as evidence in criminal proceedings against them. A week later students at a demonstration in Melbourne attacked camera crews and press photographers claiming that the media were acting as government lackeys by creating evidence of people breaking the law. This act and the actions of the Parliament House rioters represents a failure to exploit the nature and power of media reportage. Successful modern protest takes the nature of the media with its need for easily understood images and short sound bites, as its premise and constructs a strategy around it. As Mick Counihan, senior lecturer in media studies, RMIT notes,

...from even the most rabid leftie these days, the message has to be non-threatening...Modern public protest is a set piece affair. Clever strategists know that in order to get publicity, they have to get the news outlets interested and then stage the event.⁵

⁴ Everymans Encyclopaedia p678

⁵ Counihan, Mick, quoted in The Bulletin 3.9.96

"Rabid leftie" might have a different connotation in China. Though not intentionally staged for the media, the students in the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing inadvertently managed to tap into the global media machine and found themselves the subject of world media attention which they used to spread the message of their opposition. The irony is that the technology used positively to promote the protest was later used negatively by the authorities to identify and persecute the protesters.

Ultimately, the ubiquitous presence of the media has transformed and diminished the politicians need for crowds. The media can deliver a vicarious political experience to many more people watching television or reading the newspaper than the politician can to a live gathering. Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, when asked by Robert Hughes whether things would have been different if Nazi Germany had had television, replied:

...we could have put the Fuehrer in every living room, we could have done for him what the Americans had done for Kennedy.⁶

The subject of the Parliament House protest, the Government, represented here by the guards and doormen on the other side of the glass doors, is a body used to media scrutiny. As such it has elevated its handling of the media to a science. Benjamin wrote in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in 1936:

Since the innovations of camera and recording equipment make it possible for the orator to become audible and visible to an unlimited number of persons, the presentation of the man of politics before camera and recording equipment becomes paramount. Parliaments, as much as theatres, are deserted. Radio and film not only effect the function of the professional actor but likewise the function of those who also exhibit themselves before this mechanical equipment, those who govern. Though their tasks may be different, the change affects equally the actor and the ruler. The trend is toward establishing controllable and transferable skills under certain social conditions. This results in a new selection before the equipment from which the star and the dictator emerge victorious.⁷

Armed with a battery of minders, advisers, spin doctors and press secretaries (who are routinely recruited from the ranks of journalism

6 Speer, Albert, quoted by Hughes, American Visions documentary, ABC-TV

7 Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p249, Illuminations

- they know best), the modern politician participates in events that are staged solely for the camera. There is not a spectator to be seen at these events. In so doing the politician presents himself to what I call the virtual crowd of the nation's news watchers and in the process gives them the ruler's eye view of the ruler. Referring to the 1996 US Presidential election, Hughes dramatically stated that what we are seeing is

...the victory of television over the objects of its debate.⁸

During the 1996 Australian Federal Election, the then Leader of the Opposition, John Howard, appeared at a media event at Hobart's Bellerive oval with cricket hero David Boon. A tried and true electioneering technique is to be seen with a popular personality in an attempt to be brilliant by association. Howard took Boon out to the middle of the pitch where they chatted, smiled and tossed cricket balls to each other. The seats in the stadium were empty. The only people present were the camera crews, press photographers and journalists out on the pitch recording the ball tossing.⁹ The use of the stadium served two purposes: in the background of the photographs the stadium seating could be seen but was sufficiently out of focus so that it looked full; the use of a stadium lent the event an air of import and circumstance that it lacked, lending credibility through the implied approval of the absent crowd. Indeed using an empty stadium was probably preferable for Howard in that it took away the risk of any unpredictable or unwanted elements such as hecklers or protesters. In this there is the hint of the simulacrum. It is as Jean Baudrillard says:

...a perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits its vicissitudes.¹⁰

The implied crowd was in this case better than the real crowd.

Ultimately the politician discards the crowd. Instead of pursuing the oratorical art in front of a packed stadium with all the excitement and risks that entails, the modern politician will perform a short, tightly controlled and fully choreographed event, exploiting the media's insatiable appetite for good pictures and concise sound grabs.

⁸ Hughes, Robert, quoted on Lateline, ABC-TV, 30.10.96

⁹ Election footage from Media Rules documentary SBS-TV

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean, Simulations, p.4

What can be performed in front of a few hundred people can as easily be performed just for the cameras and be seen by an extraordinary number of people without the risks associated with crowds. The real crowd now is not at the scene of the event but dispersed in millions of lounge rooms around the country. In fact to attend one of these events is to miss out on what was intended for one to see. The shooting of such an event presents, says Walter Benjamin in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction:

...a process in which it is impossible to assign to a spectator a viewpoint which would exclude from the actual scene such extraneous accessories as camera equipment, lighting machinery, staff assistants, etc.- unless his eye were on a line parallel with the lens.¹¹

Even the politically reluctant - those who would not normally turn up to a political event - are a part of this crowd. Referring to a speech given by Bill Clinton during the 1996 US Election campaign, Hughes makes the connection with anamorphic art forms and the importance of view-point in such events. It is the oratorical equivalent of an Academy Awards ceremony in which:

...everything is designed for the TV cameras, so that if you're actually in the hall and you see it from any other eye line than that of the TV cameras its incomprehensible. It's like one of those perceptual jumbles of sticks that don't make sense unless you see it through a pin-hole.¹²

The event is designed to be coherent from only one viewpoint and that viewpoint does not exist at the event. The atmosphere, sense of event and mass fervour of the political gathering is replaced by correct lighting and good stage managing.

The crowd now does not need to be in one place to exist. It exists as a virtual crowd, one dispersed nationally or globally. This crowd has left the physical realm and exists now through information, its members linked by the network of electrical data that flows between them. The physically dispersed inhabitants of what McKenzie Wark describes as "Virtual Geography"¹³ -the matrix of information that spans the globe.

11 Benjamin, Walter, *ibid*, pp234-5

12 Hughes, Robert, quoted on Lateline ABC-TV 30.10.96

13 Wark, McKenzie, Virtual Geography, 1994

Conclusion

Where is the crowd on the opposition between culture and nature? On the one hand it is an entirely human thing, so one is tempted to say it is purely cultural. On the other hand, the crowd looks and feels like a natural phenomenon, and shares many of the attributes of an entity from nature. The crowd grows, behaves, looks and disperses not according to cultural dictates alone but also by the laws of nature: its component living entities are synchronised to the one rhythm, thus echoing countless natural forms.

In this paper I have set out to illuminate the links between crowds, politics, art and technology and how one element can influence another and in turn be influenced by it, and that the point at which the elements meet is a fertile ground for metaphorical possibilities. The examples I have used are idiosyncratic choices. As an artist, I am guided by the images that provoke the most persistent responses: nagging images that are inexplicably hard to forget and seem to demand closer investigation and to be fully explained. So, although there exist other art works that may seem more closely concerned with crowds, the examples I have used are the ones that hold the most relentless fascination for me. I started my investigation into these images by examining their visual elements: perspective, composition, space, and proceeded from this basis to a consideration of their metaphorical parallels. The first chapter began within the metaphorical body - the illustration accompanying Hobbes' book Leviathan represents an idea that has persisted since antiquity: that of the body as a microcosm of the political community. Then, with each chapter, the view-point gradually receded. Bosch's painting of Christ carrying the Cross was outside the body, but within the crowd - the jostling claustrophobic crowd as an animal. Works by Salgado and Breugel looked from outside to the crowd as an organism: a life-form composed of many life-forms working toward a common goal, and at the social criticisms afforded by their comparisons to both artists' contemporary life. The chapter on mass ornament addressed the importance of view-point and looked at crowds from the view-point of their leaders, and proposed a metaphor on the relationship between the community and its leader. The final chapter replaced the leader with the camera; explored the politicians' ambivalent relationship to the crowd and noted the evolution of the crowd into a global entity that does not need proximity to exist.

Crowds are not going to get any smaller. The world is facing a population crisis that could see 11 billion people on earth by 2050. All the crowds of the world could eventually join up to create one megacrowd. Paradoxically, at the same time, crowds are becoming dispersed due to the isolating effects of technology. The future of the crowd and crowd images will, as in the past, depend upon the interaction between it and politics, art and technology. Large gatherings of people will continue to rely on technology aided images to exist. Politicians will continue to have an ambivalent relationship to crowds: on the one hand needing them for support, on the other, fearing their opposition. They will deal with this by distancing themselves from any physical, immediate crowd and relying more and more on television to relay their ideas. In a way you can tell the politician's political persuasion by his/her crowd. The wealthy rarely form crowds, having access to more direct and subtle means of power. The crowd belongs to the poorer strata of society who have little opportunity to be noticed other than forming crowds. Thus it is the left leaning politician who will generally receive a favourable response from a public rally and the right leaning politician who will move away from the live crowd and rely more and more on the distancing effects of technology.

"Quantity", said Soviet President Kruschev, "has a quality all of its own." He was referring to the mutual stockpiling of nuclear weapons that was occurring at the time in his country and in the United States. But what he succinctly captured here was the phenomenon that occurs when things multiply. In his case the quality is spectacular force. In other fields, quantity may reveal other phenomena or what was previously hidden or too subtle to be discernible. For example, in the industrial structure photographs of Hilla and Bernd Becher, the composition, lighting and subject matter within a series are almost identical. The subject is always centre of frame, black and white and shot from the same height. The effect this formal consistency has of course is to show up differences. The consistent form over a large quantity of examples forms an invisibly created quietness over which the subtle mutterings of tiny details can be heard. The quantity highlights the qualities. This is a more abstract conception of what a crowd is. It may seem irrelevant to talk about groups of non-human things when discussing crowds, but to examine these things is to vary one's view-point and encourage a fresh way of perceiving them. The crucial factor throughout is the position of the view-point.

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Tonkonow, Leslie, *Multiple Exposure: The Group in Photography*, Independant Curators Inc, 1995
Wark, McKenzie, *Virtual Geography*, Indiana University Press, 1994
Witte, Karsten, Introduction to Kracauer's The Mass Ornament, *New German Critique*, No 5, Spring 1975

Graduate Diploma Research Plan 16.12.95

My area of research seems to have divided itself into two main areas:

the behaviour of crowds of people which has a sociological basis and pertains to the written component;

the whole made up of many smaller replicas of itself which relates more to my practical work.

Thesis

The work is about collectives, groups, organisations, the structure of corporations, the behaviour of individuals within crowds.

Some initial topics for consideration for the thesis:

- a) the space used to define a crowd: architecture, urban planning
- b) the collective consciousness of a crowd
- c) virtual communities: many people spread over a country or the world but sharing a common experience ie: watching the same TV event, engaged in a chat line
- d) how many in a crowd?
- e) the Westminster two party system: a war in stasis
- f) progeny symbols, things that symbolise a crowd of ancestors or antescendents: sand, trees, rivers
- g) crowd symbols: brick walls, pie charts, statistics
- h) scale relative to importance in pre-perspective painting; the more importance a particular individual has in a crowd, the larger he appears in relation to other crowd members no matter where on the picture plane he is. eg, Pope - very big. Slave - very small.
- i) uses of drawing in the depiction of crowds

I wish to discover some common characteristic between different sorts of groupings of beings. A crowd of people, a group of organic

cells. How is their behaviour similar? Are there systems of organisation that symbolise other systems? Can you use one crowd as a metaphor for another?

References and methods

The method I intend to use to address these questions is to focus on several particular works of art depicting crowds and interrogate them for the commentary they can offer on the thoughts and motivations of the individuals they hold. As well, I intend to apply any theories of crowd behaviour that I may discover to particular works of art. I will achieve these aims through writing a hypothetical narrative, the invented voice of an individual in the crowd.

Historical crowd paintings I intend to examine are 'The Funeral of the Sardine' by Goya, as well as many other works by him; 'Early Efforts-Art in Australia' by Robert Hawker Dowling

Time frame

I will spend the first few months chasing references and reading. I will then narrow the list of topics down to three or four and do some short experimental writing on each topic as part of the decision making process on which topic I will eventually choose to base the thesis on. I will then expand or combine these short pieces into the main thesis. By March I hope to have completed the preliminary reading and the short written pieces; by May have ready a draft thesis for initial responses; so that by June the thesis will be 90% complete.

Studio Practice

I intend to interrogate objects for their metaphorical potential. By repeatedly reproducing (printing, copying) the same object, its significance is compounded or metamorphosed into a new significance. Meaning is altered when a mundane object is treated as an important object worthy of reproducing. On the other hand the reproduction of scores of a highly regarded object could lessen its value. The viewer reasons that because someone has gone to so much trouble to multiply this object, there must be some significance to it and in the process of searching for meaning, invents their own.

In response to a question raised during my seminar, I intend to consider the ground on which the figures in my crowds sit: the context of individual pieces, the negative space around them. The

technique of filling up a space with figures has in the past been a device I have employed partly to get around having to think about a ground but it has actually become integral to the way I work and has contributed to the direction of my work. It's like an anti-technique because it was employed as a negative response to a particular problem.

Over the course of the year I will make several smaller pieces that concern themselves with different notions of crowds. I will then concentrate on one idea to make the major piece.

Historical drawing context

Drawing is an integral part of any successful depiction of a crowd scene. Classical perspective dictates that things in the distance should appear smaller on the picture plane than things in the foreground to create a convincing illusion of depth. The pre-perspective attitude was that the more important a figure was, the larger he/she should appear. Therefore in Medieval narrative painting, the Pope is always much bigger than the slave no matter where he appears on the picture plane. He might be way off in the distance but he will still appear larger than anyone else. Some contemporary artists toy with this denial of the laws of perspective to create subjective visions. eg Sidney Nolan's Kelly series orders the scale of characters according to their importance in the Kelly story. The story, already bordering on the legendary and mythical, is further mystified by this subjective treatment.

Composition too plays a part in that in painted crowd scenes of a narrative nature, some individuals will always be more important to the story than others, and the clever use of compositional techniques will successfully lead the eye initially to the heroes and protagonists. eg: *The Marriage at Cana* by Mattia Preti.

The idea that the whole is made up of many smaller replicas of itself is a notion that is at the centre of Chaos theory, a scientific theory that has gained wide acceptance in fields beyond the science realm. Does Chaos theory relate to crowds? I relate it to my own work in that previous works depicted a crowd of people in the shape of a human figure, made up of many smaller figures. In Chaos theory however, this self-similarity would repeat ever inwards.

My work also touches on the current debate about the body and notions of the relationship between language and the body. Corpse,

corporation, corpuscular, words used to describe the body also relate to groups of bodies.

Artistic influences

Artists' work that I find relevant to this thesis do not necessarily concern themselves with crowds but with the idea of a whole made up from many smaller pieces, work that is composite in nature. Tony Cragg's work 'Policeman' is a large wall piece composed of many small pieces of found plastic refuse. The blue pieces of plastic have been stuck on the wall and arranged into the silhouette of a uniformed figure that towers threateningly over the viewer. The key element in this work for me is the composite nature of it's structure and the shape of it's negative space that is at once it's by-product and an important element to deal with in the making of the work.

Reading List

Buck-Morss, Susan, The Dialectics of Seeing, MIT
Canetti, Elias, Crowds and Power
Jolley, Martyn, The Perpendicular and the Oblique, CSA, 1994
Kaye, Brian, Chaos and Complexity, Weinham, NY, 1993
Kracauer, Siegfried, The Mass Ornament, New German Critique, No. 5.

Collections:

National Gallery of Australia, various private collections.

Individual Awards, Patronage and Travels

1997 Australia Council Studio Residence, Japan
1996 Travel in USA
1994-5 Travel in Scotland
1994 Graduate-in-Residence, Computer Aided Art Studio,
Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU
1993-4 Participant in Baguio International Arts Festival,
Philippines, travel in Indonesia

Curriculum Vitae

Born: 22.12.61 Mt. Isa, Queensland, Australia

Education:

- 1997 Candidate for Graduate Diploma, Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, Australian National University
- 1990 Diploma in Sound Engineering, National Recording Studios
- 1987 Bachelor of Arts, Graphic Investigation, Canberra School of Art
- 1979 HSC, Hawker College, Canberra

Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions:

- 1995 Ether Ohnetitel, Melbourne
- 1994 *The Counterfeit Galaxy*, Photospace Gallery, Canberra
- 1987 *Speculations and Triangulations*, Bitumen River Gallery

Group Exhibitions:

- 1996 *Fragile Objects*, National Library
- 1996 *Digital Arts Festival*, CSA Gallery
- 1995 *The Hand of the Machine*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
- 1995 *Multiple Constantinoples*, Galerie Constantinople
- 1993 *Crosscurrents*, Baguio International Festival, The Philippines
- 1993 *Real Time*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
- 1993 *24,600 every 24 hrs*, Canberra Rex Hotel
- 1993 *Postpak*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
- 1992 *War and Memory*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
- 1991 *The Cartoon Show*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
- 1989 *Nexus*, Galerie Constantinople, Queanbyan
- 1988 *Pirate Games*, New Large Gallery, Adelaide Fringe
- 1987 *Salon Coda*, Bitumen River Gallery
- 1985 *Old Post Office Show*, Old Post Office, Canberra

Collections:

National Gallery of Australia, various private collections.

Individual Awards, Patronage and Travel:

- 1997 Australia Council Studio Residence, Tokyo
- 1996 Travel in USA
- 1994-5 Travel in Scotland
- 1994 Graduate-in -Residence, Computer Aided Art Studio, Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU
- 1993-4 Participant in Baguio International Arts Festival, Philippines, travel in Indonesia

- 1993 ACT Arts and Special Events, Grant in conjunction with Canon Australia
- 1992-3 Canon Australia, Sponsorship for production of art works
- 1991 Travel in Indonesia
- 1987 Capital Arts Patrons Organisation Studio Grant
- 1985 Big Brother Travelling Art Fellowship Eastern and Western Europe, Scotland

Bibliography, Publications, Interviews

- 44 Minutes Radio Japan, Radio Interview, 1.5.97
- Sasha Grishin, *Canberra Times*, July 1996
- Patrick Troy, The Hand of the Machine catalogue notes 1995
- Gordon Bull, The Sum and its Parts 1995
- Julie Ewington, Crosscurrents, *Art and Asia Pacific*, v1no3 1994
- Pat Hoffie, Accounting for Fun, *Art Monthly*, March 1994
- Christopher Chapman Photocopy Art-a Maverick Act ?, *Muse*, Nov 93
- Sonia Barron, *Canberra Times*, 26.9.93
- Real Time Exhibition Catalogue, CCAS 1993
- Gail Fairlamb, *Muse*, Oct 1993
- Robert Macklin *Canberra Times*, 20.10.93
- Helen Musa, *Canberra Times*, 15.10.93
- War and Memory, Exhibition Catalogue CCAS 1992
- Sasha Grishin, *Canberra Times*, 21.10.92
- MUTE Magazine, Melbourne, 1990
- 10 Years of Graphic Investigation, Canberra, 1989

Work:

- 1994-7 Lecturer, Computer Aided Art, Foundation Studies, Canberra School of Art, Institute of the Arts, ANU
- 1990-7 Part-time Floor Manager, *Lateline*, ABC-TV
- 1990-5 Part-time Curators Assistant, ANU Art Collection
- 1990-1 Part-time Technical Assistant, Canberra School of Art
- 1988-9 Bronze Founder, Meridian Sculpture Foundry, Melbourne
- 1985 Lithographers Assistant, Bordas Lithography, Paris
- 1982-7 Part-time Stage Hand, Canberra Theatre
- 1980 Political Cartoonist, *The (Nation) Review*

Theatrical:

- 1993-4 Performances with Indonesian Artist Heri Dono
- 1985-95 Member of Splinters Inc. Performance Group. Various theatrical, musical, artistic and technical roles over approx. 45 productions